

VZCZCXRO7870
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHVJ #1815/01 2350858
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 230858Z AUG 07 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6894
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHVB/AMEMBASSY ZAGREB PRIORITY 0410
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUFOAOA/USNIC SARAJEVO PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 001815

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE (HOH/FAGAN/STINCHCOMB)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA - BOSNIAN CROATS PARTIES AND THE CROATIAN
ELECTIONS

REF: A. SARAJEVO 1678

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 1672

[1](#)C. SARAJEVO 757

Classified By: POL Michael J. Murphy. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: When Zagreb holds national elections in November, Bosnian Croat voters will also go to the polls to select representatives for the "Croat Diaspora" electoral unit in the Croatian Sabor. In the past, HDZ-BiH, Bosnia's largest Croat political party, has backed the candidate list put forward by its sister party in Zagreb, HDZ-Croatia. Relations between the two parties have been strained since Croatian PM Sanader and HDZ-Croatia leader openly backed the breakaway HDZ-1990 in Bosnia's October 2006 elections, however. There is widespread speculation that HDZ-BiH may put forward its own candidate slate, a decision that could cost HDZ-Croatia several seats in the Sabor. HDZ-BiH leader Dragan Covic will likely use the threat that HDZ-BiH will compete rather than cooperate with HDZ-Croatia as leverage to force Sanader to curtail his support for HDZ-1990. For its part, HDZ-1990 has already publicly endorsed HDZ-Croatia's electoral list. Whatever the outcome of the political jockeying on this issue, for Bosnian Croat political leaders the November Croatian elections will be about politics and influence in Mostar, not Zagreb. Bosnian Croat preoccupation with the Croatian election may be a distraction in the fall when OHR and others are seeking to revive political talks on major reforms. END SUMMARY.

Bosnia Croat Voters and Croatia's Diaspora Election Unit

[1](#)2. (C) All Croatian diaspora constitute Croatia's 11th electoral unit, which carries five seats in the Sabor. A majority of Croatia's 300,000-plus registered diaspora voters reside in Bosnia, which means that Bosnian Croat voters often determine what party wins all five seats. Bosnian Croat voters have traditionally favored HDZ-Croatia, which has enjoyed unwavering support from HDZ-BiH in the past. The split in HDZ-BiH that resulted in the creation of HDZ-1990 has changed the nature of the election, adding a layer of uncertainty to the once-predictable outcome. HDZ-1990 has maintained sisterly relations with HDZ-Croatia, while HDZ-BiH and HDZ-Croatia have grown increasingly estranged. Bosnian Croat participation in Croatian elections has been declining despite an increase in the number of polling stations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnian Croat

voters understand that the composition of the 11th electoral unit has little impact on their daily lives.

The Bosnian Croat HDZs

13. (C) Though the April 2006 constitutional reform provided the policy pretext for the split within HDZ-BiH, many believe that personal politics as much as the dispute of the U.S.-brokered package of constitutional amendments prompted Bozo Ljubic and others to form HDZ-1990. Ljubic and his allies, particularly Martin Raguz, had long chafed under Dragan Covic's leadership of HDZ-BiH. At the time of the split, most Bosnian Croat observers suspected that Ljubic and Raguz acted with Croatian PM Sanader's encouragement given the reported bad blood between Sanader and Covic. Sanader's decision to endorse HDZ-1990 in Bosnia's October 2006 elections was interpreted as confirmation of these suspicions. HDZ-1990 used its single issue and Sanader's support to transform itself into an important political force within Herzegovina, but it did not deliver a knock out blow to Covic and HDZ-BiH, which remains the largest and most influential Bosnian Croat political party.

14. (C) Since the October elections, Bosnian Croat community leaders, particularly the Catholic Church, have sought to heal divisions among the two HDZs and encourage greater cooperation among all Bosnian Croat political parties on major reforms. The attempt by the five main Bosnian Croat political parties to reach agreement on an "All Croat" Declaration on Constitutional Reform is the most prominent manifestation of these efforts (Ref B). For whatever reason, Sanader and HDZ-Croatia have also stepped back from the types of overt interventions they made in Bosnian Croat politics

SARAJEVO 00001815 002 OF 002

during 2006. These changes have not put an end to the political trench warfare between the two HDZs, as demonstrated by as the prolonged, often bitter, struggle for control of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton government (Ref A).

15. (C) With Covic still standing and, many speculate, eager to take political revenge on Sanader, the Bosnian Croat political capital is rife with rumors that HDZ-BiH may nominate its own candidates for Croatia's 11th electoral unit rather than support HDZ-Croatia's list. There is widespread speculation that Covic may even seek a seat in the Sabor himself. Covic commands a sufficient percentage of the Bosnian Croat vote to present a serious challenge to HDZ-Croatia if he runs a competing list. Thus far, HDZ-BiH spokesman Miso Relota, when asked to comment on the rumors, has studiously avoided a clear public endorsement of HDZ-Croatia. Relota would only tell us that HDZ-BiH is not yet focused on the Croatian elections.

16. (C) Undoubtedly, more is happening behind the scenes than Covic and others in HDZ-BiH are willing to discuss. A political agreement between Covic and Sanader on a support for HDZ-Croatia's electoral list remains possible, but Covic's asking price will likely be high. At a minimum, he would want Sanader to call off his political dogs once and for all. Covic would also likely use a deal to strike a blow against his HDZ-1990 rivals, perhaps by securing a commitment from Sanader to exclude HDZ-1990 names from HDZ-Croatia's 11th unit electoral list. Though Covic is keeping his cards close to his chest, Mostar-based observers believe he has considerable leverage over Sanader because political commentators in Herzegovina predict the Croatian elections will be close and Sanader will need all five diaspora seats. For its part, HDZ-1990 has publicly reiterated its support for HDZ-Croatia and Sanader, vowing to support and nominate as many HDZ-1990 members as possible to any list Sanader proposes.

Other Bosnian Croat Parties

17. (C) Whatever the outcome of the political battle between HDZ-BiH and HDZ-1990/HDZ-Croatia over the 11th unit electoral list, it appears likely there will be at least two competing Bosnian diaspora candidate lists in Croatian elections this fall -- one submitted by HDZ-Croatia and another by the Croatian Peasants Party in Bosnian and Herzegovina (HSS-BiH).

HSS-BiH President Marko Tadic has already announced his party's intention to generate its own independent candidates list. The Croatian Party of Rights-Djapo/Juriscic (HSP-D/J) intends to follow the lead of its sister party in Croatia and support Sanader in the hope that HDZ-Croatia will include HSP-D/J on its list. Though HSP-D/J has been effective at raising its political profile among Bosnian Croats, most doubt that this will translate into meaningful influence on the HDZ-Croatia list issue.

Comment

18. (C) Some Bosnian Croats had hoped that the Croatian election would serve as a uniting force for HDZ-BiH and HDZ-1990. They reckoned that the two opposing parties might work together to increase the odds of an HDZ-Croatia victory over its rival Social Democratic Party, which envisions abolishing the diaspora vote. This, in turn, could serve as springboard for greater Bosnian Croat unity within Herzegovina and Bosnian politics. Covic, however, may view November elections as an opportunity to settle an old score with Sanader and weaken his HDZ-1990 rivals. Ljubic and HDZ-1990 also appear unlikely to set aside past differences with their HDZ-BiH rivals. As a consequence, for Bosnian Croat parties, the November Croatian elections are likely to be meaningful due to their impact on Mostar politics, not Zagreb. If HDZ-BiH and HDZ-1990 do not rally around the HDZ-Croatia list, we expect that the two parties will focus their attention this fall on the campaign rather than on OHR's plans to revigorate the reform process.

MCELHANEY